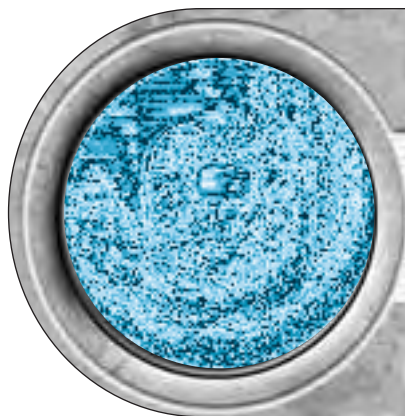




FINDING MY PLACE

Dying to Belong

February 26, 2011

1 PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

James 5:16 (Message) • “Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with.”

Philippians 2:1, 2 (NIV) • “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

(See additional passages in student material.)

B. WHAT'S TO BE SAID ABOUT “FINDING MY PLACE”

The sense of belonging to a group is probably one of the most important motivating factors in the lives of your earliteens. Teens need to have friends and to feel that they belong. This is a healthy, normal desire that should be met by Christian fellowship within your church and youth group. Teens need to recognize that the desire to belong can get out of hand when it leads them to do things they believe are wrong, just to be accepted by “the group.” While strong

Christian friendships should be nurtured and encouraged, teens need to discover for themselves that belonging to Jesus gives the ultimate sense of acceptance.

C. WHERE WE'RE GOING WITH “FINDING MY PLACE”

As a result of this lesson we would like the students to be able to:

1. Evaluate their own need to “belong” to a group.
2. Recognize the importance of having standards that can't be compromised for the sake of popularity.
3. Explore ways to build stronger community within their church, Sabbath School, and youth group.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) slips of paper.

Connecting • Bibles, student lessons, construction paper, markers, scissors, glue.

2 BRIDGING

A. WHERE WE'VE BEEN BEFORE

Allow 10 minutes as students are arriving to:

1. Ask them which verse they chose to learn from Wednesday's portion of their lesson.

Give them opportunity to say their verses from memory.

2. Give the students opportunity to “quote” themselves, using what they wrote in the Monday portion of their lesson. Be sure to debrief them about any quotations that might not reflect the Christian life accurately. However, quotations of this nature do not occur in every lesson.
3. Review responses that they and others made to the scenario that was posed on Sunday. Discuss the variety of responses, ending with thoughts from last week’s What’s to Be Said About . . . in the teacher lesson.

If you have a very large group, have adults available to process this section with smaller groups of students.

B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

- >> Song service
- >> Mission emphasis (find a link for *Adventist Mission for Youth and Adult* at www.realtimefaith.net)
- >> Service project reports

3 BEGINNING

NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively *and* with one another) and to study from the Word. At some point you should distribute or call their attention to their student lesson for this week.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Have the group sit in a circle. In advance, make up as many slips of paper as there are people in your group. One slip of paper should say, “Rooster.” All the others should say, “Do not

stand up. Remain seated and make no noise.”

Get set • Tell class members you are going to play a game called “Barnyard Animals.” **Say:** **Each person will get a piece of paper with the name of an animal on it. Do not show your paper to anyone. I’m going to count to three, and on the count of three, each person will stand up and make the noise of the animal written on your paper, as loudly as you can.**

Go • Distribute papers. (Keep track of the paper that says “Rooster” and make sure it goes to someone confident and not easily embarrassed.) Count to three. The intention is that the “Rooster” will stand up and shout “Cock-a-doodle-doo!” while everyone else sits silently and stares at them.

Debriefing • Ask: How did it feel for the “Rooster” to be the only one standing and making a noise? Did the person look ridiculous? out of place? If I had given that piece of paper to someone new to the group, who was shy and didn’t know the others well, how do you think they would have liked the game? Even for a confident person, was it a little embarrassing to be the only one standing and making a noise? What does this game illustrate about trying to fit into a group of people? Have you ever had the feeling that you’re the odd one out? How did you deal with that?

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • As the first few people in class arrive, **say:** **We’re going to conduct an experiment today. We’re going to pick a few people at random from those who arrive later on, and treat them differently from everyone else.** With the students’ input, decide on an arbitrary standard you will use to make some people in the group feel left out. You could pick, for example, anybody wearing red, or the fifth and seventh people to enter the room, or whatever.

Get set • As the rest of the students enter, ignore those who are supposed to be “left out.” You and the others who arrived early can quietly explain to those who come in later what the standard is and who is going to be excluded. Keep up the activity until everyone has noticed what’s going on.

Go • Once everyone has noticed that some people are being ignored (you may have to make the ignoring quite obvious), end the experiment by explaining what you were doing and apologizing to the people who were excluded.

Debriefing • **Ask those who were excluded:** How did you feel when people wouldn’t talk to you or include you in what was going on? Did you have any idea why they were acting this way? How did you feel when you found out it was all an experiment? (relieved, angry, upset, etc.) **Ask those who did the ignoring:** How did you feel about picking out people at random to ignore? Did any of you refuse to participate? Why or why not? **Ask everyone:** How does this reflect the way people are often treated in groups and cliques? Have you ever been the one left out? Have you ever been the one ignoring others?

C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, tell the following story:

Sara changes schools in the middle of the year. She had a few good friends at her old school but now she rarely sees them anymore. Her new school is much larger and there are very clearly defined “cliques.” She’s not much into sports, so she doesn’t fit in with the jocks. The really smart kids are extremely “nerdy” and Sara doesn’t want to hang out with them. She meets some girls who are very popular and seem to like and accept her, but she soon discovers they are doing things that she doesn’t want to get involved in, like smoking and shoplifting. She doesn’t know them well yet, and feels that if she says “No” to these activities, these girls won’t accept her.

Debriefing • **Ask:** Do you think Sara’s situa-

tion is a realistic one? Is it anything like the way things work in your school or neighborhood? What kinds of “cliques” exist among teens you know? Does everyone have to fit into a certain “group” to be accepted? What happens to people who don’t have a group to belong to? Have you ever found yourself having to do things you didn’t want to in order to be part of a group of friends? What would you do if you faced that situation, and you didn’t have another group of friends to hang out with?

4 CONNECTING

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

Ask students to look at the Bible verses from Wednesday’s portion of the student lesson. Read through them together and ask students to paraphrase in their own words what each says about friendship. Does the Bible text reflect their experiences with friends?

Hand out construction paper, markers, scissors, and glue. Invite each student to choose one of the Bible verses and write it on a card that they will give a friend, thanking that person for their friendship. They can then decorate the card any way they want. If they do (or have done) the exercise from Friday’s portion of the student lesson, their “thank-you” letter can be sent along with this Bible verse card.

B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION

Ask someone to read or tell the story from Sabbath’s portion of the student lesson.

Ask: Have you ever known anyone who felt this discouraged about their friendships? Discuss the sentencing of the girl who harassed her. Should being unkind to someone receive a criminal sentence? **Ask:** What would have happened to this girl if Dawn-

Marie hadn't killed herself? (Her actions would have been forgotten or unnoticed; she certainly wouldn't have been charged in court for what she did). **Point out that many acts of unkindness happen in school every day but only rarely do they have such obvious consequences. What kinds of unseen consequences might they have?** (hurt, bitterness, depression, loss of faith, etc.) **How important is it to you to have supportive friends?**

C. CONNECTING TO LIFE

Pose the following scenario:

You are a friend of Dawn-Marie's (in the story mentioned above). You aren't one of the girls who has been tormenting her, but you haven't been actively supporting her either. On the afternoon before she's going to kill herself, she phones you, tells you how miserable she's feeling, and asks for your advice.

Think about how important it is to have good friends, and how you could best be a supportive friend in this situation.

Say: What do you tell her?

5 APPLYING

A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Talk about how your Sabbath School class could function better as a group of supportive Christian friends. **Ask:** What do we need more of in order to function better as a supportive group of friends? What do you need less of? (gossip, criticism, competition)

Work together to plan a social activity that will bond your group together. If your group normally does a lot of social things together, plan something new that places the emphasis on inviting non-Christian friends and showing them how Adventist Christian teens have fun together. If getting together outside Sabbath School time is unusual for your group, take the plunge and plan a fun time just for your class (department).

Debriefing • Tailor your debriefing to the needs of your particular group. Discuss what your group has done in the past that has or hasn't worked to bring the group together socially. Talk about how you can take "fellowship" to another level within the group, or how to reach out and include others who aren't normally included.

B. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

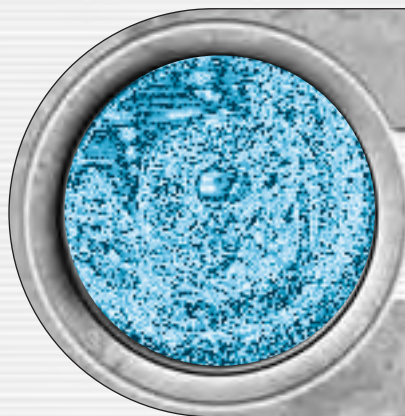
1. What's the most extreme thing you've ever done to be accepted by a group or to fit in with your friends? Do you regret it?
2. Personal question: Do your Christian friends/church friends meet your needs for a group of friends to belong to? If not, why not? What do you think could make this a better support group for you?
3. What's the best thing a friend has ever done for you?
4. What's the best thing you've ever done for a friend?
5. Is it OK for a Christian to have a non-Christian as their best friend? Why or why not? What might be the positive and/or negative results of such a choice?

6 CLOSING

SUMMARY

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

God wants you to have close friends. He put the need for friends, for belonging, into our human nature. But God doesn't want to see you destroy your Christian experience by having friends who are a bad influence on you. It's important to belong, but not so important that you should violate your personal standards and beliefs in order to be part of a clique. As a Christian, your ultimate support group should be the church, your fellow believers. Let's work together to be positive Christian friends for one another!



STUDENT LESSON

FINDING MY PLACE

Dying to Belong

February 26, 2011

>>KEY TEXT: Choose one of the texts from Wednesday's portion of the lesson. Write it here and memorize it this week.



DYING TO BELONG

(What connection do you think the following illustration has with the Bible texts on the other page?)

Dawn-Marie Wesley was a typical Canadian teenager. She went to school and hung out with a bunch of friends. But, as sometimes happens with a group of friends, things went wrong when another girl heard second-hand that Dawn-Marie was spreading rumors about her.

In November, 2000, Dawn-Marie's life became miserable. Her former friends ganged up on her. She became a target for school bullies. Other girls even threatened to kill her. Even the few friends who didn't join in the harassment did nothing to stop it.

Finally, Dawn-Marie couldn't take it any longer. On November 10, she went home and hanged herself in her room. A younger family member found the body. Dawn-Marie left behind a suicide note in which she said she was

killing herself because three girls at school were out to get her. She named the girls, and one was later charged with criminal harassment.

"If I try to get help, it will get worse," Dawn-Marie wrote. "They are always looking for a new person to beat up and they are the toughest girls."

Belonging to a group of friends is one of the greatest feelings in the world. Being on the outside of a group is one of the most painful and miserable. Of the many teenagers who decide to end their lives every year, many, like Dawn-Marie, do so because they are bullied, picked on, or left out of a group of friends.

The girl who was convicted of doing the most to bully Dawn-Marie wasn't sentenced to serve time in a juvenile prison. Because both she and some of Dawn-Marie's family were aboriginal, they participated in a traditional First Nations' sentencing circle, which decided she should serve 18-month parole with community service. At the circle, the girl gave Dawn-Marie's family a letter expressing how sorry she was for what she had done. "Now I watch what I say," she wrote. "It will have a lasting impact on me for the rest of my life."

While you may never feel as desperate as Dawn-Marie did, you have probably felt lonely at times. Maybe you've found it hard to fit in with a group—or maybe you've been the one excluding someone else. How deep is our need for friendship and acceptance? For most of us, it goes straight to the heart.



Sunday

HERE'S WHAT I THINK

This week's illustration is about a girl who killed herself because her former friends were making her life miserable. The need to have friends who accept and include you is pretty important for teens. How important is it to you? How far would you go—or have you gone—to be accepted by a group? Where do you draw the line? Are there some things you'd never do, even to be accepted by your friends?

Log on to www.guidemagazine.org/rtf to post your responses. Be up-front and honest. Say what you think.



Monday

WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO SAY?

Different people, different opinions. Some of the quotations below represent the views of true kingdom citizens; others may not. Can you tell the difference? How do these statements compare with what God is saying in His Word? After reviewing the texts in the God Says . . . portion of the lesson, write a statement that captures your belief. Be prepared to quote yourself at Sabbath School.

>> "There are many things which a person can do alone, but being a Christian is not one of them."

—William T. Ham.

>> "In a Christian community, everything depends upon whether each individual is an indispensable link in a chain. Only when even the smallest link is securely interlocked is the chain unbreakable." —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 20th-century German clergyman.

>> "Aloneness can lead to loneliness. God's preventative for loneliness is intimacy—meaningful, open, sharing relationships with one another. In Christ we have the capacity for the fulfilling sense of belonging which comes from intimate fellowship with God and with other believers." —

Neil T. Anderson, 20th-century U.S. pastor and writer.

>> "Dare to love and to be a real friend. The love you give and receive is a reality that will lead you closer and closer to God as well as those whom God has given you to love." —Henri Nouwen,

20th-century Dutch theologian and writer.

>> "Whether it's something as little as studying for a biology test or something as big as finding a job over Christmas break, I can't always fly solo. As humbling as it is to admit, I need the help of other people. I'm discovering this is also true for my Christian life. I need my Christian friends to help me grow in my relationship with God." —Christy Simon, current U.S. university student.

>> "The only way to have a friend is to be one." —

Ralph Waldo Emerson, 19th-century U.S. essayist and poet.

Write your own quotation.

WHAT I SAY IS . . .



Tuesday

SO WHAT?

Sure, everyone wants to belong. It's great to have friends that you feel comfortable with. But what do you do if you don't have that? Maybe you've just moved to town or changed schools and you're finding it hard to get to know people. Maybe your interests, your tastes, or your values make you a little different from most people you know, and it's hard to find a group that's "just right" to hang out with.

A lot of times we're tempted to change ourselves in order to fit in with friends. Sometimes change can be a good thing. For example, you can learn to be more tactful, more thoughtful, more outgoing, all of which will help you get along better with people. You might even take up a new sport or hobby just to make new friends. But what about changing your values?

Drinking or smoking because your friends do? Cutting down and criticizing less-popular kids so you can stay part of the popular crowd?

Having friends is great. But not if you have to take apart who you really are and become someone else in order to impress them. Jesus experienced what it is like to be loved by some, but hated by others. He is always a safe Friend to go to for help.



Wednesday

GOD SAYS . . .

>>Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10 (CEV)

"You are better off to have a friend than to be all alone, because then you will get more enjoyment out of what you earn. If you fall, your friend can help you up. But if you fall without having a friend nearby, you are really in trouble."

>>Proverbs 18:24 (Message)

"Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family."

>>Hebrews 10:24, 25 (CEV)

"We should keep on encouraging each other to be thoughtful and to do helpful things. Some people have gotten out of the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that. We should keep on encouraging each other, especially since you know that the day of the Lord's coming is getting closer."

>>Proverbs 17:17 (Message)

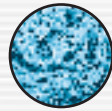
"Friends love through all kinds of weather, and families stick together in all kinds of trouble."

>>1 Thessalonians 5:11 (Message)

"So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind. I know you're already doing this; just keep on doing it."

>>Proverbs 27:17 (CEV)

"Friends sharpen the minds of each other."



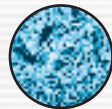
Thursday

**WHAT DOES THIS
HAVE TO DO WITH ME?**

We all need friends, but friends come and go. The one friend who will always stick with you is Jesus. His love is unchanging and unconditional.

The best friends to have are friends who will encourage and support you in your walk with Jesus—because they're walking with Him too! But what if there aren't many kids your age at church? Or you just don't get along well with them? Or your "Christian" friends are actually more cliquish and gossipy than your non-Christian friends? (Hey, it happens!)

Pray about it. Talk to your parents, your Sabbath School teacher, any adult who knows you and cares. Yes, you can be friends with a wide variety of different kinds of people—in fact, it's good for you! But to grow as a Christian, you need to find Christian friends. Maybe you need to reach out to a friend at church you haven't gotten to know that well. Maybe you can broaden your horizons and include friends who share your beliefs even if they're a little "different" from you in other ways. God has people for you—people who'll pray for you and build you up instead of tearing you down as a Christian. Ask Him to help you find them.



Friday

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Think of a friend who has been helpful and encouraging to you. Take a few minutes to write that friend a letter, thanking them for the help and encouragement. Tell your friend you are praying for them. Practice here what you will say in the letter.



